

Traffic Safety Facts

Traffic Tech – Technology Transfer Series



Number 324

March 2007

Connecticut Tests NHTSA'S High Visibility Enforcement Impaired Driving Campaign in 2003

In 2003, Connecticut launched a statewide impaired-driving publicity and enforcement campaign to reduce impaired driving and alcohol-related fatalities. This initiative was a test of NHTSA's High Visibility Enforcement (HVE) impaired driving model.

Connecticut's campaign had three components: (1) media with an enforcement message, (2) enhanced periods of enforcement surrounding the July 4th and winter holidays focusing on using sobriety checkpoints, and (3) sustained DWI enforcement between holiday enforcement periods. The model included crackdown periods and sustained enforcement supported by paid and earned media.

Paid and Earned Media

For each holiday enforcement period, the State implemented a four- to six-week paid and earned media campaign with a strong enforcement message. Earned media is coverage a program "earns" whenever it makes the news in print or broadcast. The focus of the media campaign was primarily male drivers age 21 to 34 because of their high rate of involvement in alcohol-related crashes. The media increased awareness of the enforcement activities, especially during holiday periods, and increased the perceived risk of being stopped if a driver had been drinking. Some media components continued throughout the seven-month campaign.

Sobriety Checkpoints

Sobriety checkpoints constituted the main focus of the enforcement effort. During the July 4th holiday period, the State funded 24 sobriety checkpoints. Fifteen towns held at least one checkpoint each during this period. During the winter holiday period, 28 police agencies and the State police conducted a total of 51 sobriety checkpoints, more than twice as many as conducted during the July 4th holiday period. Under the expand-

ed grants, local law enforcement officers in 18 towns and the State police conducted a total of 89 checkpoints, some of which were conducted during the two holiday enforcement periods. Researchers collected direct measurements of drinking and driving from drivers passing through 20 additional sobriety checkpoints by obtaining voluntary, anonymous blood alcohol concentration (BAC) information from a random sample of drivers.

Statewide Telephone Survey

Telephone surveys were conducted before and after each holiday period from a representative sample of 2,430 Connecticut drivers using random digit dialing.

There was a statistically significant increase in the number of respondents who reported hearing or seeing something about alcohol impaired driving enforcement after each holiday period compared to those asked before the holiday periods (+8.6 and +8.5 percentage points, respectively). The perception that State police very strictly enforced drinking and driving laws rose from 39.2 percent to 48.8 percent from the period before to the period after the July 4th holiday enforcement period, and again from 38.3 percent to 48.1 percent before and after the winter 2003 holiday enforcement period. After both holiday periods, there was also an increase in respondents who thought that a driver who had been drinking was more likely to be stopped by an officer (54% to 63% and 54% to 65%).

Direct Observations of Driver BACs

Over three times as many sobriety checkpoints were held during the winter holiday and were preceded by more checkpoints during the sustained enforcement period, so the cumulative effect of the campaign on driver Blood Alcohol Concentrations requires comparing the pre July 4th data to the post winter holiday period data.

Driver BACs were collected at sobriety checkpoints in nine towns before and after the holiday enforcement periods. Randomly selected drivers gave voluntary, anonymous BACs on a handheld breath-testing device. Generally, about 92 percent or more drivers agreed to the BAC test. The team collected 1,249 BAC samples from drivers before and after the July 4th holiday enforcement period and 2,115 BAC samples from drivers before and after the winter enforcement period.

The results of the roadside BAC surveys showed an increase in the number of drinking drivers after the July 4th holiday period that was consistent with self-reported drinking and driving on the telephone survey. A comparison of the positive BAC results from the pre- and post-winter holiday periods indicated that the proportion of positive BAC results decreased while the proportion of zero BAC results increased. There was a significant decrease in the proportion of drivers with positive BACs from the pre-July 4th period to the post-winter holiday enforcement period.

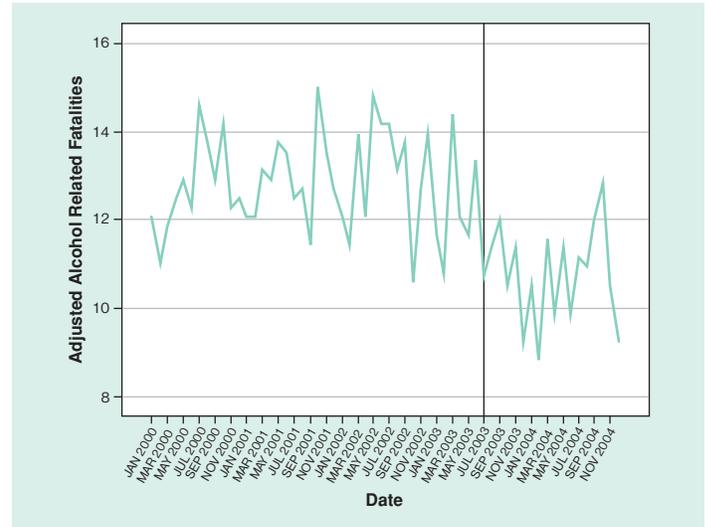
Driver BACs and Refusals for Roadside Surveys (2003)

	July 4th Pre (%)	July 4th Post (%)	Winter Pre (%)	Winter Post (%)
	(N=616)	(N=723)	(N=1168)	(N=1132)
Positive BAC	13.5	16.5	11.0	9.3
Zero BAC	80.5	76.1	79.8	83.3
Refused Test	6.0	7.5	9.2	6.9

Alcohol-Related Fatalities Decreased

ARIMA analysis indicated that alcohol-related fatalities in Connecticut decreased significantly after the beginning of the high visibility enforcement campaign. This graph shows Connecticut alcohol-related fatalities adjusted for seasonal trends and economic variations from contiguous counties in Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island. Overall, there were about 37 less alcohol-related fatalities in Connecticut for the 18 months following the beginning of the campaign.

Connecticut's Alcohol-Related Fatalities 2000-2004 Adjusted for Trends in Contiguous Counties



Summary

Surveys indicated that the paid media reached a substantial number of Connecticut drivers. Law enforcement agencies conducted a large number of sobriety checkpoints throughout the campaign, with a particularly large number during the winter 2003 holiday period. The combined publicity and HVE campaign achieved its ultimate goal: significantly reducing the alcohol-related fatalities. For the 18 months following the start of the first campaign crackdown in July 2003, an estimated 2.6 lives a month (47 lives total) were saved and the alcohol-related fatality trend significantly decreased for men 21 to 34 years old, saving an estimated 1.6 lives each month (28 lives total).

How to Order

For a copy of the *Connecticut's 2003 Impaired Driving Publicity and Enforcement Campaign* (31 pages), conducted by Preusser Research Group, download from www.nhtsa.dot.gov, write to the Office of Behavioral Safety Research, NHTSA, NTI-130, 400 Seventh Street SW., Washington, DC 20590, or send a fax to 202-366-7096. John Siegler, Ph.D., was the contracting officer's technical representative.



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

400 Seventh Street SW., NTI-130
Washington, DC 20590

TRAFFIC TECH is a publication to disseminate information about traffic safety programs, including evaluations, innovative programs, and new publications. Feel free to copy it as you wish. If you would like to receive a copy, contact Melissa Cheung, MPH, Editor, fax 202-366-7096, e-mail: melissa.cheung@dot.gov.